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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: NEW POLL SHOWS RULING PNP AND OPPOSITION
JLP PARTIES TIED IN PUBLIC SUPPORT

REF: A. A. KINGSTON 1286
[B. B. KINGSTON](#) 2020
[C. C. KINGSTON](#) 2021
[D. D. KINGSTON](#) 1298

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

[11.](#) (U) The ruling People's National Party (PNP) and opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) are tied for public support at 32 percent each, according to the latest Bill Johnson poll commissioned by the Jamaica Gleaner newspaper. Since Portia Simpson Miller (PSM) became head of the PNP and Prime Minister in March, her popularity, as well as that of her Party, has eroded significantly. A series of scandals and questions regarding her overall "fitness" to run the government have contributed to PSM's - and her party's - slippage. She now faces a difficult dilemma: whether to call elections soon to capitalize on her remaining popularity, or wait until mid-2007 in hopes that a successful Cricket World Cup and associated work programs and infrastructure improvements will have impressed the electorate. Her choice is now a question of intense speculation throughout the country. Privately, she must wish she had held elections straightaway upon becoming Prime Minister, when she almost certainly would have won in a landslide.

End Summary and Analysis.

THE PNP CONTINUES TO SLIP

[12.](#) (U) A new Gleaner-commissioned Bill Johnson poll released on November 5 interviewed 1,008 eligible voters in 84 communities throughout Jamaica's 14 parishes. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus three percent. This is the fourth poll conducted by Bill Johnson Polls since the election of PSM to head the PNP.

[13.](#) (SBU) Public support for the PNP has fallen steadily from a high of 52 percent in March to 32 percent. Several scandals and one very public "doodle" appear to have contributed to the PNP's (and PSM's) downward slide. The cement scandal (ref A) has, according to the Planning Institute of Jamaica, left approximately 30,000 construction workers temporarily unemployed. In addition, recent riots in parts of Kingston have been linked by some contacts to the cement debacle and a possible intraparty conflict between Industry and Commerce Minister Phillip Paulwell and supporters of PSM over the future distribution of cement jobs (ASDAR). PSM has not burnished her image by publicly supporting Minister Paulwell despite widespread belief that he mismanaged the entire cement imbroglio.

¶4. (U) The Trafigura scandal (Refs B,C) also is hanging over the head of the PNP. The Party accepted a JMD 31 million (approximately USD 475,000) "gift" from a Dutch-based oil trading firm. This affair has led to the resignation of Minister for Information and Development Colin Campbell, a close ally of PSM. The possible misuse of Petrocaribe funds (Ref D), as well as ongoing concerns about crime and corruption, round-out the list of reasons for the decline of the PNP's popular support. The Party also is hampered by internal dissent. Recently, four PNP candidates selected to run in the next elections resigned in protest over the replacement of a longtime PNP representative in South East St. Elizabeth; the Party is replacing him with a former JLP-member and independent Senator.

¶5. (U) Beyond the PNP, PSM seems to be at least partially responsible for the slide in popular support. Her favorable opinion has slipped from 60 percent to 54 percent. According to pollster Bill Johnson, the scandals themselves have not hurt her as much as her missteps. PSM recently canceled a trip to Europe and meetings with the EU Commissioner and the Vatican. Speculation abounds in the media that PSM canceled the trip because of fear she might be asked questions she could not answer. Finally, she was photographed in parliament creating a "doodle" during an ongoing debate; this incident has provided fodder for journalists and opposition leaders alike who consider her a lightweight. Johnson believes that PSM's falling poll numbers indicate she has not lived up to high popular expectations. Her unfavorable numbers have increased from 19 percent in July to 29 percent, while her job approval rating has fallen from 55 percent in July to 49 percent.

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A RAY OF HOPE FOR THE JLP?

¶6. (U) While the PNP continues to lose ground, the poll found that the JLP actually has increased their popular support. Stymied at 26 percent backing from the public since March, the JLP finally has broken through to reach 32 percent. The JLP launched a major campaign in July to target a number of parishes and build ground support for the Party. With the advent of government scandal, they also are benefiting from being out of power for 17 years. The scandals have had little - if any - impact on the JLP itself.

¶7. (U) To improve his image, Opposition Leader Bruce Golding has embarked on a "softening" publicity campaign in which he is pictured with his family. Golding's favorable ratings are up to 46 percent; however, they had been as high as 50 percent in May. His unfavorable rating is currently at 20 percent -- down from a high of 30 percent in May.

Johnson